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Curios and Relics
Furniture
Dresser
Made by Thomas Lincoln

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



Lincoln Lore

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FURNITURE MADE BY THOMAS LINCOLN

In *Lincoln Lore*, Number 1476, February 1961, the corner cupboards made by President Abraham Lincoln's father were described at some length. The third paragraph of that article stated that "there are several . . . pieces of cabinet work still extant in Kentucky, Indiana and possibly Illinois, which Thomas Lincoln is known to have constructed. These include cherry spool beds, mantelpieces, desks, bookcases, chests and sideboards." This issue of *Lincoln Lore* will feature some of these miscellaneous products of Thomas Lincoln's workshop.

Another issue of *Lincoln Lore*, Number 513, has related in some detail how Lincoln worked as a carpenter between the years 1803 and 1809. In fact, there is a well authenticated tradition that the President's father owned the best set of carpenter tools in Hardin county. Exactly when Thomas Lincoln served his apprenticeship as a carpenter and cabinetmaker is not known, but by the time he became of age he was doing rough carpentry and making plain furniture.

It may be a reasonable supposition that Thomas Lincoln learned his trade in the shop of the Reverend Jesse Head. This was the Methodist minister who performed the marriage ceremony uniting Nancy Hanks and Thomas Lincoln on June 12, 1806. When Thomas Lincoln lived with his widowed mother in Washington County, Kentucky, one of his neighbors was Jesse Head whose fifty acre farm on Read Run, some distance from the county seat town of Springfield, was located in "the midst of the Lincolns and Berrys . . ." Jesse Head was born on June 10, 1768, in Frederick County, Maryland and was some eight years older than Thomas Lincoln.

This energetic pioneer was constantly engaged in cabinetmaking, in deposition taking and in preaching. As recognition of his skill as a cabinetmaker increased, he eventually moved his shop to Springfield. Jesse Head became sufficiently established as a cabinetmaker to have three orphan boys apprenticed to him. One record reveals that on November 7, 1797, David Redmond, the orphan of Alexander Redmond, was bound to Jesse Head to learn the art of a cabinetmaker. The boy was to remain with

Head for three and one-half years, and at the end of his apprenticeship he would receive from the master craftsman a joiner, foreplane, jack and smoothing plane.

An interesting court order dated May 9, 1809 stipulates "that Jesse Head be and he is hereby appointed to make and hang shutters to the lower windows in the Court House."

A small mahogany bureau measuring 18" x 24", the product of Jesse Head's cabinetmaking shop, is today extant. It was made in 1836 for the uncle of Mrs. M. E. Sharp (1921) of Mercer County, Kentucky.

This information, documentary and otherwise, fairly well established Jesse Head as a cabinetmaker; and the fact that Thomas Lincoln lived in Washington County and was for awhile (Fall of 1786 to the turn of the century) a close neighbor of Jesse Head, would provide him with ample time and opportunity to learn the trade of a carpenter and cabinetmaker.

The following pieces of Lincoln furniture, exclusive of cupboards, are known to be extant and are listed here as examples of Thomas Lincoln's handiwork:



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Cherry hutch made by Thomas Lincoln for Richard Vernon about the year 1807. Now owned by Mrs. L. B. Hoke of Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

AUCTION

TUESDAY, MAY 24, 1:30 p. m.

Antiques, Furniture, China, Silverware

We have contracted with the McCullum Realty Co. to sell all of personal property of the late Mary E. Sweets at her home located at 212 Mulberry Street, Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

One Cherry Day Bed

One of the finer pieces we will sell is a Cherry Day Bed which was made by Thomas Lincoln, father of Abraham Lincoln, authenticity is supported by original affidavit executed by Mrs. Emma Churchill, granddaughter of Richard Vernon for whom the bed was originally made by the said Thomas Lincoln.

Antiques

Love Seat with two chairs to match, pair figurines, clock, China candelabra, fruit bowl, vase, water service with 2 goblets, walnut table, spinning wheel, china, glass, and other small items.

Furniture

Desk, 3 dressers, chest of drawers, 2 trunks, day bed, ball tree, 2 wash stands, 2 beds, 2 book cases, vanity dresser, 2 large rugs, radio, electric refrigerator, lamp, dining room set, breakfast table, coal range, kitchen cabinet, china cabinet, china, silverware (sterling), walnut table, 2 swings, 2 mirrors, divan, lawn chairs, washing machine, picture frames, number of chairs, dishes, and many small items not mentioned.

First-Hardin National Bank,
Exec. of Mary E. Sweets

McCullum Realty Co.
H. ED. McCULLUM, JR., Auctioneer Elizabethtown, Ky.
Phone 4232 "We Have Sold in 24 States and Canada"

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation
Advertisement poster of Mary E. Sweets' sale announcing that the cherry day bed made by Thomas Lincoln will be sold at auction on May 24, 1949.

1. Cherry Hutch
Owned by Mrs. L. B. Hoke, Elizabethtown, Kentucky.
2. Cherry Day Bed
Owned by Mr. Howes Mead, Paintsville, Kentucky.
3. Cherry Sugar Chest
Owned by J. S. McMurtry, Lawrenceburg, Kentucky.
4. Pine Mantlepiece
Exhibited in the Lincoln Room of the Armor Center Officer's Open Mess, Fort Knox, Kentucky.
5. Cherry Desk and Bookcase
Owned by Mr. and Mrs. Townsend Taylor, South Bend, Indiana
6. Cherry Chest of Drawers
Owned by Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois.

Affidavits or descriptive information concerning the individual pieces of Thomas Lincoln's cabinetwork follow:

1. Cherry Hutch

Affidavit

"Mrs. Emma Churchill, being duly sworn, states that her grandfather, Richard Vernon, lived near Elizabethtown in Hardin County, Kentucky, and that he had Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham Lincoln, who was also living near Elizabethtown and working at his trade as carpenter, cabinet maker and wheelwright, make several pieces of furniture for him.

"She states that the said Thomas Lincoln made a cherry chest or side-

board for her grandfather. She well remembers seeing this piece of furniture in her grandfather's home and later in the home of her aunt, Mrs. Lou Vernon Dodge.

"Her grandfather, Richard Vernon, told her that Thomas Lincoln made said furniture about the year 1807 and he kept it in his own home until his death when it became the property of his daughter, Mrs. Lou Vernon Dodge, who owned it until her death in the year 1908. When the furniture of Mrs. Lou Vernon Dodge was sold at public auction just following her death this chest was purchased by Mrs. Bettie J. Martin of Elizabethtown, Ky. who has had it in her possession ever since that time.

"Mrs. Churchill further states that she can positively identify the chest as the same piece which was owned in her family for two generations and later by Mrs. Bettie J. Martin as the same piece which her grandfather told her was made by Thomas Lincoln (more than a hundred years ago) and that she knows said piece of furniture has never been out of the possession and ownership of the three parties named herein.

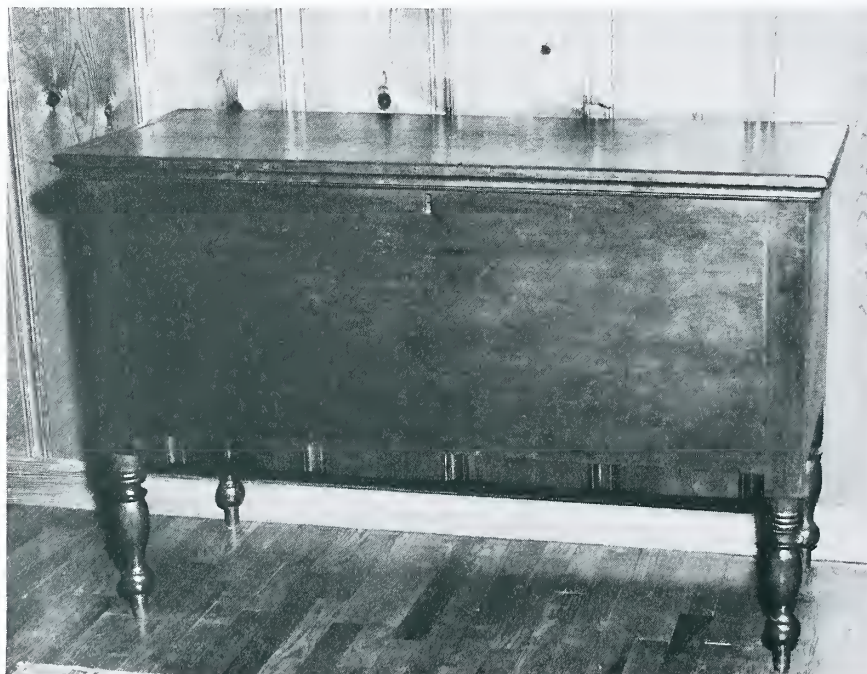
Signed: *Mrs. Emma Churchill*

Subscribed and sworn to before me by Mrs. Emma Churchill this October 17, 1927.

Signed: *L. K. English*

Notary Public Hardin County, Ky.
My commission expires Feby. 19, 1928"

Mrs. Emma Churchill was the wife of Virgil H. Churchill who, for many years, conducted a jewelry store in Elizabethtown. The family lived on Main Cross Street (now West Dixie Avenue), moved away for some years, returning later to reside on College



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation
Cherry sugar chest owned by J. S. McMurtry, Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, said to have been made by Thomas Lincoln for Mrs. Samuel Haycraft, Sr. of Elizabethtown, Kentucky in 1796 or 1797.

Street, where Mrs. Churchill died. Her aunt, Mrs. Lou Dodge, mentioned in the affidavit, lived in a large residence on West Dixie Avenue, now owned by Mrs. R. V. Wathen. Mrs. Bettie Martin was the mother of Miss Maggie Martin and Mrs. Lawrence Richardson, whose property and household effects were sold on May 19, 1960. At this public auction the cherry hutch was sold to Mrs. L. B. Hoke for \$700.

2. Cherry Day Bed

Another piece of furniture made by Thomas Lincoln for Richard Vernon was a cherry day bed, which was sold at public auction in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, on May 24, 1949. The bed was the property of the late Mary E. Sweets who resided at 212 Mulberry Street. Mr. Howes Meade of Paintsville, Kentucky bought this piece of furniture, the authenticity of which was attested by an affidavit executed by Mrs. Emma Churchill and similar in statement to the one regarding the cherry hutch.

3. Cherry Sugar Chest.

The cherry sugar chest owned by J. S. McMurtry of Lawrenceburg, Kentucky is said to have been made by Thomas Lincoln in 1796 or 1797 for the owner's great-great-grandmother, Margaret, the wife of Samuel Haycraft, Sr. An affidavit affirming the historical authenticity of the sugar chest follows:

Affidavit

"I, Joseph S. McMurtry, hereby certify that I was told by my father, G. E. McMurtry, who was in turn told by his mother, Sarah Maria McMurtry, the daughter of Samuel Haycraft, Jr., the son of Samuel Haycraft, Sr., that this cherry sugar chest was



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Mantelpiece made by Thomas Lincoln in the Lincoln Room of the Armor Center Officer's Open Mess, at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

made for his wife Margaret Van Meter Haycraft during the winter of 1796-1797 at which time Thomas Lincoln was employed by the said Samuel Haycraft, Sr., as a millwright at Haycraft's grist mill at Elizabethtown, Ky.

Signed: J. S. McMurtry

Joseph S. McMurtry

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 24th day of April 1963.

Signed: S. McWilliams, Jr.

Notary Public

My commission expires January 9, 1964."

4. Mantelpiece

The mantelpiece (probably made of pine wood) in the Lincoln Room of the Armor Center Officer's Open Mess at Fort Knox, Kentucky, was taken from a house about one mile north (U.S. 31 W) of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, which was built in 1805 and was originally owned by Hardin Thomas. Samuel Haycraft, Jr., in his book "A History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky And Its Surroundings" written in 1869, made the statement that "He (Hardin Thomas) lived in a house rather better than usual for that day, the carpenter's work of which was executed by Thomas Lincoln, the father of the late President; and the most of that work is to be seen at this day, sound as a trout, although done upwards of sixty years ago." The Hardin Thomas house is still standing and is located on the farm of Heady Jenkins, the Elizabethtown Postmaster.

In the fall of 1919, when Camp

Knox was under construction, Major William Radcliffe, a construction quartermaster, lived with his family for a time in Elizabethtown in the home of Mrs. J. F. Albert, a great-granddaughter of Hardin Thomas. From Mrs. Albert, Major Radcliffe learned of the Hardin Thomas house, and from Mr. B. F. Jenkins he secured for the United States Government the Thomas Lincoln mantelpiece. It was then installed in a building called "The Hostess House" at the army post.

After World War I the post was deactivated. Later on, a civilian who lived on the edge of the reservation thought the mantelpiece was in danger of being destroyed and had it removed from "The Hostess House" which had later become a Station Hospital. Without the authority of the United States Government, the mantelpiece was offered first to the Woman's Club at Elizabethtown on condition that it be installed in the Brown-Pusey Community House. However, Dr. William Allen Pusey, the donor of the community building, declined to let the mantelpiece be installed.

The relic was then offered to the Kentucky Pioneer Memorial Association of Harrodsburg, Kentucky, which readily accepted it. However, while the mantelpiece was on display it was not incorporated in the building known as the Mansion Museum, but was attached to the wall adjoining the Music Room.

In 1934, when the army post was again reactivated, a new Officers' Club was built and Col. J. P. Barney, who

was in command at Fort Knox, learned of the mantelpiece, possibly through construction quartermaster records. He took immediate steps to recover the mantelpiece and his claim to it could not be denied since government money had originally purchased it. Therefore, the mantelpiece came home to Fort Knox and now has a place of honor in what is known as "The Lincoln Room" of the Officer's Mess.

5. The Cherry Desk and Bookcase

The cherry desk-bookcase owned by Mr. and Mrs. Townsend Taylor is best described by Forrest Fischer in the *LaPorte Herald-Argus* of April 4, 1949. At the time the article was written the Taylors resided at New Carlisle, Indiana. They are now residents of South Bend, Indiana. A portion of the newspaper article follows:

"Between 1816 and 1830 a farmer and trapper in Rockport, Ind., supplemented his income by building cabinets and furniture.

"His name was Thomas Lincoln, and as he worked tediously with his hands and tools to turn crude cherry wood into desks and cupboards his son, Abraham, watched and offered his help.

"The story of the Taylors' desk since it left the workshop of Tom Lincoln early in the 19th century is an interesting one.

"Rockport is the birthplace of Mr. Taylor, and his family seat. It was there Mr. Taylor's ancestors first obtained the desk and began passing it down from generation to generation.

"During its lifetime the desk has been used as a book case for law books, as a cabinet to store the powders and equipment of a druggist, in



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Cherry desk and bookcase made by Thomas Lincoln and exhibited in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Townsend Taylor of South Bend, Indiana.

the kitchen of a southern Indiana housewife who kept it well stocked with dishes and food, and it finally returned to its designated use as a desk kept carefully polished in the Taylor family at New Carlisle.

"Mr. Taylor tells this story:

"The first practicing doctor in Spencer county, a Dr. Crook, is charged to be the first owner of the desk after it was completed by Thomas Lincoln.

"Dr. Crook used the desk for many years in his office as a writing table, but upon retiring passed the desk on to Judge Thomas DeBruler.

"Judge DeBruler, a well-known attorney in southern Indiana at the time, and a contemporary of Abraham Lincoln, who was practicing law in Springfield, Ill., was Mr. Taylor's great grandfather, according to the story.

"The Judge used the tall cabinet of the desk in which to stack thick, dusty law books. He passed the desk on to Dr. A. D. Garlinghouse, a druggist and doctor in Rockport. Dr. Garlinghouse used the desk as a supply cabinet for medicants and prescriptions.

"As Dr. Garlinghouse's practice grew and he enlarged his office quarters he moved the desk to his residence in Rockport. There his wife, the former . . . Taylor, placed the desk on a screened-in kitchen-porch to use for the storage of food dishes and kitchen utensils.

"According to Mr. Taylor, the Garlinghouses were his grandparents on his mother's side. They donated the desk to Mr. and Mrs. Taylor.

"Although its exact age is not known it is well over 100 years old. The Taylors have received offers from several Lincoln collectors, including the Ford museum, to buy the desk.

"The Taylors, however, vow that they will never sell the desk. Although it is not pretty it is the symbol of early American life and struggle.

"The desk stands about eight feet high from the floor to the top of the cabinet section. The cabinet section is designed as a book case and is enclosed by two glass doors.

"The desk compartments for letters and writing materials are concealed under the desk top which raises up on hinges. There are no drawers in the desk. It is made of solid cherry wood which has never been painted or varnished, the Taylors claim."

6. Cherry Chest of Drawers

The inlaid cherry chest of drawers is without a doubt the most beautiful of all the Thomas Lincoln furniture described in this article. It is now the property of Southern Illinois University, a gift of Philip D. Sang of Chicago, Illinois.

The chest was made by Thomas Lincoln for the Austin family of

Hardin County, Kentucky and later became the property of the Harbolts and Atchers, all of whom are well known families living in the vicinity of Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

An affidavit attesting to its origin follows:

Affidavit

"Mrs. Crit Atcher, being duly sworn, states that according to statements made by the several members of the Atcher family, a cherry, five drawer, inlaid chest of drawers now owned by Bell Smoot of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, was made by Thomas Lincoln, father of Abraham Lincoln.

"She further states that according to the statements of the family that the chest was made by Thomas Lincoln for the Austin family. It descended to the Harbolt family and later to the Atcher family who sold it to the present owner, Bell Smoot.

"Mrs. Atcher states that she can identify the chest as the same one sold to Bell Smoot and that the chest has never been out of the ownership and possession of the three families named in the affidavit.

Signed: *Clara Atcher*

May 29, 1960

State of Kentucky
County of Hardin

Subscribed and sworn to before me a Notary Public for the county and State above written.

Signed: *Joe G. Gafford*
Notary Public

My commission expires Dec. 31, 1962."

Mr. Bell Smoot who purchased the chest of drawers had the piece in his possession about forty years before securing the above affidavit. During the entire period that he owned it he was under the impression that the chest had been made by Thomas Lincoln.

There are several other miscellaneous pieces of furniture in Kentucky and Indiana that were made by Thomas Lincoln, but at this late date all the records concerning them have been lost. In fact, the editor knows of several so-called pieces of Thomas Lincoln furniture in Kentucky that have all the earmarks of being genuine, but because they lack authentication they cannot be included in this study.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Inlaid cherry chest of drawers made by Thomas Lincoln and exhibited at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois.



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